

LUBBOCK COUNTY'S New Detention Center:

DAN CORBIN, CJM, AND MALCOLM CHAMBLISS



As I prepared my remarks for our ribbon-cutting ceremony, it occurred to me just how rare a situation this was. In my comments, I stated that no one ever enters into the profession of corrections thinking he or she will be directly involved in a jail design and construction project. Instead, most jail staff envision a normal career path that takes them up the supervisory ranks and ultimately to jail administration or even over to law enforcement. For my part, that was certainly true. However, when the conversation started and it became clear that Lubbock County had to act, my ideas about a normal career path changed.

In this article, the story is told of how Lubbock County Detention Center moved from recognition to needs assessment to obtaining funding and ultimately to design and construction. In the end, everyone who was involved directly, as well as the community, considered the project an overwhelming success. True, it was a collective and collaborative process for everyone in Lubbock County and the sheriff's office, but the key was accessing resources from outside the jurisdiction, including tapping into the resources of the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), hiring an experienced consultant, and accepting offers of assistance from other agencies that had traveled the same road. One critical resource from the NIC is Facility Development Process, written by Dennis Liebert, Gail Elias, and James Robertson. Future project planners will discover that this publication (nicic.gov/Library/024005) takes a very complex process and breaks it down into a proven, step-by-step method that ensures a more manageable endeavor.

SHERIFF KELLY ROWE
Lubbock County, Texas

Vision to Occupation



The former Lubbock County Detention Center's needs had surpassed what the facility could provide. Aside from various maintenance issues, administration's major concern was overcrowding. As a result, in August 2000, then-Sheriff David Gutierrez and his staff, as well as County Commissioners James Kitten and Kenny Maines, attended the "Planning of a New Institution" program in Longmont, Colorado, at the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). At this program, they obtained valuable information on how best to proceed with developing the vision of a new facility into a reality. The first action plan was to hire a consultant who specialized in the planning, construction, and transition of new jail facilities.

In January 2001, a consulting firm was selected to assist with the project. The goal of the firm and Lubbock County to create a new detention center consisted of three

principal objectives. The first was to conduct a needs assessment. This assessment would be used to accomplish the second objective: to program, develop, and design the new facility. The final objective was to establish a location and a preliminary cost estimate of the facility based on the program.

Planning the Jail

The needs assessment was completed in the spring of 2001. Among the observations were:

- The inmate population would increase over time.
- The current facility (originally built in 1931) was past its life expectancy.
- Maintaining the current facility would be more costly than that of building a new one.

Another consideration was that construction should occur where enlargement of the facility was possible.

Programming began immediately after completion of the needs assessment and was based on the breakdowns for the estimated numbers of inmates, security levels, and other classification considerations. Basic services and inmate rehabilitative programs were planned into the new design. It was decided early to use a basic podular, direct supervision facility design, which has no bars between the officers and inmates; instead it affords officers constant observation of inmates, allowing them to interact with inmates and thus providing direct supervision. A long-term master plan was also developed at this time.

The next step in the process was to look at various building designs and locations. Two downtown concepts were considered: a 16-story high-rise building (the second-tallest building in the Lubbock skyline) and a twin-tower concept. Initial cost estimates for the downtown options were approximately \$141 million. This estimate did not



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include purchasing the additional property needed for the facility. Another option was to leave the downtown area, which was estimated to cost approximately \$124 million. The county already owned more than 500 acres of land that could potentially be used for the project. Additionally, this concept would avoid high-rise construction and allow for horizontal growth.

The planning committee now faced several decisions: facility site, costs related to each design option, what to request from voters, and how to maximize building the much needed beds to the successful passing of a bond election. It was evident that the overall scope of the project needed to be reduced and part of the design planned as future expansion. After many hours of careful thought and several sharpened pencils, some significant reductions were implemented. These would enable Lubbock County to achieve its top priority of more beds while reducing overall costs to a attainable level.

With only a slight variance in the programmed projected bed count, the cost of the project was reduced to \$83 million. This was the number that would be put forth to Lubbock voters.

Over the next several months, a public information and awareness campaign was launched to inform the citizens of Lubbock County not only of the New Jail Project, but more importantly, about the current situation of the existing facility, the overcrowding, and what the future might hold as Lubbock continued to grow. In November 2002, the citizens of Lubbock County voted overwhelmingly to pass the bond. Now the real work began.

Designing the Jail

By April 2003 a new criminal justice architectural firm was selected to design the new jail. Initially, they were tasked with maximizing the number of beds but staying within budget. This was accomplished

through a three-phase process. First was the schematic design, similar to the conceptual drawings, but with more detail regarding how the building would be arranged. Second was design development, when detailed drawings took shape and began to incorporate all the disciplines of construction (plumbing, electrical, etc.). All dimensions were tested to ensure that the building could actually be built. Last were the construction documents, detailed blueprints that the general contractor needed to actually construct the building. These also included specifications of every detail—right down to nuts and bolts. In each phase, the design involved a detailed discussion, which resulted in drawings that were reviewed and then discussed. This process continued until all parties agreed with the results.

When the construction documents were completed, they were sent to all the appropriate regulatory agencies for review and approval (for example, the Texas Commission

on Jail Standards, local building code officials, the fire marshal's office, and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation). After the reviews of the regulatory agencies, the project was finally ready for construction bidding in the spring of 2005. On August 2, 2005, the much-anticipated groundbreaking for the new 1,332-bed, state-of-the-art detention center occurred. On May 22, 2006, an additional \$12.5 million dollars was obligated to build a sixth cluster, expanding capacity to 1,512 beds.

Transitioning to New Technology

Even before the groundbreaking occurred, the sheriff and his senior staff realized they would need a team to oversee construction on behalf of the sheriff's office and to identify staffing needs, training requirements, new policy and procedures to incorporate the direct supervision philosophy, as well as a plethora of other tasks. Sheriff (then Captain) Kelly Rowe, the assistant jail administrator, set about identifying and recruiting his team. His desire was to convene a group of well-rounded individuals who were willing to explore all avenues and develop the best course, instead of adopting the "we've always done it this way and it works philosophy." Capt. Rowe realized that this was the ideal time to introduce innovative ideas to more effectively operate the new facility, such as utilizing technology and inmate behavior management. This became the assignment for the eight people who formed the new Office of Transition Planning, or transition team.

The transition team developed and implemented many innovative ideas during its existence, including the use of technology. Some of these technologies were used to streamline the operations of the detention center. One of the many changes implemented was a video visitation system, which enables visits between the public



and inmates without the inmate leaving the housing area. By using high-speed, digital video equipment and individual handsets, inmates and visitors can visit with a minimum of distractions from other visitors or surrounding activities. Video visitation is easier and more efficient for staff, the public, and inmates. It also minimizes the possibility of smuggling contraband into the facility. This system also enables attorneys to visit their clients from designated booths in which conversations are not recorded, ensuring attorney-client privilege.

In addition to visitation, the video system can be used for video arraignment. Judges can connect to the system from their offices and conduct arraignment hearings without coming to the detention center. In the future, this technology could include remote attorney visits, allowing counsel to visit multiple clients without leaving their office. All of these features reduce the need to move inmates, thus increasing security.

Another innovative technology involves the use of wireless, hand-held bar code scanners to log activities such as jail security checks, meals served (including special diet meals), and other required entries. These scanners are actually hand-held computers that allow corrections officers to make entries in their daily logs without returning to their stations. This gives officers free time to spend in the dayrooms managing their inmates instead of being tied to a desk updating logs. Almost anything can be logged from the hand-held scanners. Roll calls are logged by scanning the barcode on each inmate's wristband. At the end of the scanning, the system reports whether all inmates have been scanned, and if not, which inmates are unaccounted for. Also, supervisors can view the real-time status of the roll call.

Another technology used in the facility is not so much a new

technology as an updated one. The old facility had quite a number of cameras that were fixed-focus and fixed-position, as well as black and white. The new facility does have a few fixed-position cameras, but most of the cameras are the pan, tilt, and zoom variety, and all are full color. Having cameras that move and zoom in automatically, and that can also be operated manually, allows better monitoring of what occurs in the facility. Another upgrade to the camera system is its recording ability. The old system relied on VCRs; the new system records digitally using DVRs. This improves access to video, sorted by time and area. Video segments can be recorded to DVD for long-term storage and review, if needed.

The detention center also uses a touch-screen system for door and utility controls. The new system includes a number of features that increase officers' ability to control their housing units. Each officer can now control the doors to pods as well as the lights, intercoms, television, and phones. The new system also includes a built-in duress system to maximize officer safety.

Finally, biometric thumbprint scanners are used in the booking and release processes. Each inmate's thumbprint is scanned and recorded in the computer when he or she is booked into the facility. This information becomes an electronic signature. As inmates review documents during their incarceration, they acknowledge by "signing" the document via a thumbprint scan. Also, when inmates are released, their thumbprints are scanned again to positively identify them before leaving custody.

Early in the process, the transition team recognized that an extensive training program needed to be developed for the 144 new hires as well as existing staff. Courses such as the NIC-developed *How to Run a Direct Supervision Housing Unit* and *Interpersonal Communications in a Jail Setting* were identified as



necessary for all licensed staff, new and old, as well as the Texas State mandate of a 96-hour Basic County Corrections Officer Course for all new hires. Additionally, with the assistance of the Collin County and Randall County sheriff's offices, Lubbock County was able to provide

their officers with practical application training in a direct supervision housing pod working with experienced officers from their respective counties.

Completion of the Jail

Although delayed because of construction issues, the facility was completed approximately \$6 million under budget and certified for occupancy by the Texas Jail Commission on July 1, 2010. A ribbon-cutting ceremony occurred on July 14, 2010; approximately 600 people were in attendance. A phased move-in schedule was developed to successfully transition inmates into the new facility. On July 19, 2010, the first group of inmates, who were housed outside the county, was returned. The schedule allowed the staff to implement their newly learned direct supervision skills with a smaller number of inmates and gradually increase the population of each housing pod. This contributed significantly to the successful occupation of the facility. ■

Dan Corbin, CJM, has been employed by the Lubbock County Sheriff's Office since 2003, following a 20-year career in law enforcement with the U.S. Air Force. He is currently the Chief Administrator for the sheriff's office. A 1990 graduate of Northeastern University, he holds a bachelor of science degree in law enforcement. He is a Certified Jail Manager and possesses an Advanced Jailers Certificate through the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education. Chief Corbin is a graduate of the National Jail Leadership Command Academy and is a certified instructor and licensed peace officer. He may be reached at DCorbin@co.lubbock.tx.us.

Capt. Malcolm Chambliss has served in the Detention Division of the Lubbock County Sheriff's Office for more than seven years. He served as a member of the transition team for five years in preparation for opening Lubbock County's direct supervision, 1,512-bed detention center. He currently commands the day shift and the detention response team. He may be contacted at 806-775-7032 or MChambliss@co.lubbock.tx.us.